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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY), NEA/ARPI (TROBERTS),
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SUBJECT: AMERICAN CORNERS CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Summary

1. Embassy Muscat facilitated videoconferences (DVCs) on African-American literature at two American Corners to commemorate Black History Month. Dr. Dan T. Carter, a professor at the University of South Carolina, spoke on the "U.S. Civil Rights Movement," and poet and novelist Natasha Trethewey described "Contemporary African-American literature." The programs enlightened young Omani audiences about the compelling history of African-Americans and their contribution to broader American society and engendered lively discussion between the speakers and their audiences. End summary.

Civil Rights Come to Life

2. On March 1, 2005, about fifty Omani students attended a videoconference on the "U.S. Civil Rights Movement" at the American Corner in the Modern College of Business and Science in Muscat. The guest speaker was Dr. Dan T. Carter, a noted educational specialist who has received numerous awards in the field of African-American studies. Dr. Carter's vivid personal account of growing up in the segregated south and observing sit-in and protests helped to make the American civil rights struggle come to life for an audience of over 50 Omani students, many of whom are currently enrolled in American history courses. Dr. Carter's presentation was followed by a lively question and answer session in which students asked pointed questions such as why America continues to classify its citizens by race; what can be done to eliminate prejudice against blacks in America; and what can the government do to help lift blacks out of poverty? Dr. Carter, recognizing the sincerity of the students' questions, gave thoughtful, balanced responses to their questions.

Contemporary Literature, Probing Questions

3. On March 8, 2005, the American Corner in Salalah, Oman's second most important city, organized a videoconference with noted author and award-winning poet Natasha Trethewey. Ms. Trethewey began her discussion of Contemporary African American literature by reciting some of her own poems, before going on to describe contemporary African-American literature and how it has changed over time. A small but engaged audience listened attentively to her remarks. The question and answer session became energized when students began to consider whether works by hip-hop artists such as "Puff Daddy" and "50 Cents" should be considered contemporary African-American literature.

The Corners are Growing Up

4. These programs were the first attempts by the fledgling American Corners to design and implement their own outreach activities. Although the programs were technically and organizationally imperfect, they met their goal of bringing an understanding of the diversity of American society to Omani youth. The DVCs also enabled the American Corner staff to gain confidence in their ability to arrange successful activities with minimal Embassy oversight.

BALTIMORE